

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method for use in improving profitability of one or more business entities, the method comprising:

receiving business-related data from at least two business entities;

storing at least some of the data from each of the business entities in a common database;

and

10 in accordance with the terms of an agreement among the business entities, allowing at least one of the business entities to receive information gathered from the common database.

2. The method of claim 1, where allowing one of the business entities to receive information gathered from the common database includes gathering at least some of the information from data received from a business entity other than the one receiving the information.

3. The method of claim 1, where allowing one of the business entities to receive information gathered from the common database includes granting that business entity permission to gather the information directly from the common database.

20 4. The method of claim 1, where allowing one of the business entities to receive information gathered from the common database includes gathering the information on behalf of that business entity and then delivering the information to the business entity.

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5. The method of claim 1, where storing data in the common database includes storing the data in a database maintained by an entity in the business of providing data warehousing services.

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6. The method of claim 1, further comprising granting unrestricted access to the common database only to a third party named in the agreement among the business entities.

7. The method of claim 1, where storing data in the common database includes storing the data in a scalable data warehouse.

5 8. The method of claim 1, where storing data in the common database includes storing the data in a data warehouse having a total capacity of at least approximately one terabyte.

10 9. The method of claim 1, where storing data in the common database includes storing the data in a data warehouse having a total capacity of hundreds of terabytes.

10 10. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving data that describes the customers of at least one of the business entities.

11. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving data that describes the products offered by at least one of the business entities.

12. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving data that describes the business operations of at least one of the business entities.

20 13. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving a combination of at least two of the following types of data from the business entities: consumer data, product data, and operations data.

25 14. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes occasionally receiving new data from the business entities.

15. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving data that is also stored in a private data warehouse maintained by one of the business entities.

16. The method of claim 1, where receiving business-related data includes receiving data that is also stored in private data warehouse maintained on behalf of one of the business entities under a data-warehouse services agreement.

5 17. The method of claim 1, further comprising negotiating the agreement among the business entities in the group.

18. A method for use in operating a consortium among a number of distinct business entities, the method comprising:

10 collecting business-related data gathered by the business entities;

negotiating an agreement among the entities for pooling the collected data in a shared data warehouse;

extracting information from the pooled data in accordance with terms of the negotiated agreement; and

delivering at least some of the extracted information to each of the business entities in the consortium.

19. The method of claim 18, where collecting data includes pooling the data into a data warehousing system owned by a third party who does not contribute any of the pooled data.

20. The method of claim 18, where collecting data includes pooling the data into a data warehousing system owned by a third party who is in the business of providing data warehousing services.

25 21. The method of claim 18, where negotiating the agreement includes drafting the agreement to include terms governing the types of data to be placed in the shared data warehouse.

30 22. The method of claim 18, where negotiating the agreement includes drafting the agreement to include terms governing access to the shared data warehouse.

23. The method of claim 18, where negotiating the agreement includes drafting the agreement to include terms governing the types of information that can be extracted from the shared data warehouse.

5 24. The method of claim 18, where negotiating the agreement includes drafting the agreement to include terms providing for payment of money in exchange for services provided by a third party selected to maintain the shared data warehouse.

10 25. A computer network comprising:

one or more channels for use in receiving business-related data from at least two business entities; and

15 a shared database comprising:

a storage facility in which at least some of the data received from each of the business entities is stored;

20 a mechanism for use in granting database access only in accordance with the terms of an agreement among the business entities; and

a computer system configured to:

25 gather information from the shared database when instructed to do so by a party having access to the database; and

30 deliver the information to at least one of the business entities.

6 26. A computer program, stored on a computer-readable medium, for use in analyzing business-related data, the program comprising executable instructions that, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to:

receive business-related data from at least two business entities;

25 store at least some of the data received from each of the business entities in a shared database;

grant database access only in accordance with the terms of an agreement among the business entities;

30 gather information from the shared database when instructed to do so by a party having access to the database; and

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deliver the information to at least one of the business entities.